# Field Trip Report

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**Name/s of traveler/s**: Melkamu Bezabih, Aberra Adie & Immaculate Omondi

**Dates and place of travel: 23 – 26 July 2014** – Lemo Africa RISING Site

**Purpose of the travel: Attend Africa RISING/ILSSI joint project farmers’ field day**

**Field day objectives:**

1. Experience sharing and lesson learning among farmers
2. Documentation of lessons during forage growth and sheep fattening
3. Gather ideas for a better approach for future implementation of the protocol

**Key people contacted (contact details):**

1. Ato Workneh Dubale, Africa RISING Lemo site coordinator
2. Ato Lobe, Lemo woreda OoA, Livestock expert
3. Dr Melese, Areka Research Center, livestock researcher coordinator
4. At Nigussie Kifle, Angacha woreda OoA, Livestock office head
5. DAs and Farmers at Upper Gana, Jawe and Karakicho (Agacha)
6. Ato Fekadu Tessema, Researcher at Worabe Research center
7. **Field visits and experience sharing among farmers**

A total of 76 participants with the following composition attended the field day on 24th July 2014: 13 farmers who have been involved in the pilot irrigated fodder sheep fattening project, 50 farmers who have shown interest to produce irrigated fodder and involve in fattening practices, 2 researchers from Areka and Worabe research centers, 2 livestock experts from the woreda office of agriculture, 6 development agents and 5 staff from ILRI Addis & Nairobi. The field day took place in the Upper Gana Kebele of Lemo Woreda at the homestead of one of the participants of the pilot project (Tefera Anito). Farmers from Kerekicho Kebele of Angacha Woreda and Jawe kebele of Lemo Woreda were transported to the field day site (Upper Gana Kebele) using rented car. Aberra Adie welcomed all the participants and explained the objectives of the field day, and the program of the day’s activity. The participants were then invited to introduce themselves. An opening speech was made by the representative of Lemo woreda office of agriculture. This was followed by a brief introduction and explanation of the Africa RISING/ILSSI projects in general and the irrigated/fodder fattening research protocol in particular by Melkamu Bezabih (ILRI Researcher). Four farmers have been participating in the pilot project in the Upper Gana kebel; all of these farmers brought their sheep to the gathering site. Participants visited the sheep being fattened by these four farmers. While visiting, the participants were asked to evaluate and rank the performance of the four farmers. With an interactive assessment, the participants picked two criteria to evaluate how good the sheep management by the four farmers was: 1) weight gain of the sheep, and 2) neatness of the sheep. Both criteria were scored through visual observation and palpation. Accordingly, the four farmers got 1 to 4 ranks based on the two criteria, with the top ranked farmer given applauds.

An experience sharing session was then opened where individual farmers stood and explained their own experiences with the fodder production and sheep fattening process: the challenges they faced, the opportunities they saw, the lessons they learned and their views for future improvement in the implementation of the research protocol.

The experiences and views of farmers who participated in the pilot project are summarized as follows.

* All participants mentioned that they allocated plots of land and planted the irrigated fodder with interest to generate alternative source of income from fattening. The land preparation and growth of fodder during the dry period required quite some labor. The use of treadle and hip pumps to lift water from shallow wells was generally unsuccessful and the farmers in Lemo woreda used manual lifting mechanisms to irrigate their fodder and vegetable nurseries. They recalled the suggestions that they forwarded during the experience sharing visit to Angacha and requested again to acquire rope and washer pumps.
* The farmers evaluated that the preparation they made to start the sheep fattening in terms of feed acquisition, animal house preparation, feed processing, and labor allocation for managing the sheep appeared to be not enough. The farmers, mainly from Lemo Woreda, mentioned that although they had some level of experience with sheep rearing, they did not have such intensive engagement with sheep fattening and they were overwhelmed by the labor and feed demand that they experienced during this pilot trial. Most of the farmers mentioned that the feed consumption of the sheep was much higher than their expectations, and they experienced difficulty in meeting the feed demands of the sheep. They mentioned that, because their land size is small, they could not let the sheep graze freely, and someone has to be with them if they are out for grazing as sheep for most of the day generally prefer grazing than indoor feeding. As a result the labor demand to manage the sheep was quite high. The farmers mentioned that it requires high level of commitment and dedication to make the fattening successful and they learned good lessons from this pilot trial.
* The purchasing price of the sheep was another point of discussion for farmers. The sheep were supplied by Doyogena sheep breeders cooperative. The farmers believed that the price of the sheep was higher than the market price at the time, and may have a negative impact on their profitability when the sheep are sold. An explanation was given as to how decision was made to buy sheep from Doyogena sheep breeders’ cooperative for the pilot project. Initially it was planned that farmers would buy the sheep from their own cash. But farmers were not ready for that. The second option was to link the farmers to microfinance institutions so that they borrow money and buy the sheep. This alternative was also not possible because most of the farmers have already taken credit and the microfinance was not in a position to give them additional credit. Finally the last alternative was to contract licensed sheep suppliers to provide the required type of sheep using money allocated through ILRI (Africa RISING and ILSSI projects) and following formal purchasing procedures. From ILRI’s financial procedure point of view, it has not been possible to draw advance money and provide to farmers to make their own purchases. It has also been believed that purchasing sheep from organized institutions like Doyogana sheep breeding cooperatives would strengthen future linkages among institutions to facilitate input supply and output market. Lemo and Angacha Woreda staff (Livestock experts), Areka Research Center, ILRI staff and Africa RISING site coordinator were involved in the purchasing process.
* Farmers and Woreda staff mentioned that the regular weight measurement of the sheep and the feedback on the performance of animals was very useful and interesting to follow.
* The farmers compared sheep fattening with cattle fattening in terms of labor demand, feed demand and profitability. The majority of the farmers mentioned that the profit from five fattened sheep would be comparable to that of a fattened ox. But the labor demand is much less with the latter than the former. This is because an ox can be easily tethered and fed, whereas the same practice is difficult with five sheep. According to the farmers, the feed consumption of an ox is comparable to that of two Doyogena sheep. With all these justifications, a considerable number of the farmers said that they would prefer to shift to cattle fattening than sheep fattening in the next round of action research. On the other hand other groups of farmers insisted that they still prefer to continue with sheep fattening, with some farmers stating their past successful experience with fattening large size of sheep (around 24) at a time. These latter groups of farmers mentioned that the key for success is to have firm commitment and give due attention to the work. They said studying the market trend and know the right time when to buy and sell sheep is key for success.
* Following this, a discussion agendum was opened on pros and cons of sheep and cattle fattening. Some farmers mentioned that the sheep they are fattening have been frequently affected by disease and they sought veterinary services repeatedly. Two farmers reported loss of one sheep each due to illness. However, the farmers stressed that the risk with sheep fattening is less than that of cattle fattening. They said, with cattle if you lose your ox, you lose everything, but with sheep, although one dies, the others would still be there to cover the main expenditures on the fattening. The other advantage they mentioned is the ease with which the sheep can be sold in the market compared with cattle. With regard to cattle fattening, the advantages they mentioned were low level of labor and feed demand, and relatively high profit.

After the farmers aired their experiences, Woreda experts and researchers added their views. The main ones were: 1) interest should be the driving force for the engagement of farmers in the different livestock activities, and every farmer can purse his/her own preferences independent of the others. Therefore, the choice to fatten sheep or cattle will be left to the farmer. But family members as a whole have to agree and be committed to the production; 2) the commitment of the household head and the family in general is very important for the success of the fattening project. In relation to this, cases were mention where family problems and conflicts have affected the pilot sheep fattening program in Kerekicho, Jawe and Upper Gana Kebeles; 3) Woreda experts also cautioned that the challenges with sheep fattening were documented through this pilot trial, but the challenges with cattle fattening are yet to be seen and compared. Therefore, the assumption that fattening an ox is better than fattening five sheep is not based on evidence and needs to be researched (piloted) before large group of farmers involve themselves in this activity; 4) availability of adequate feed resource is essential for the fattening and farmers should be very well prepared in acquiring the required amount of feed beforehand. For this, the farmers should allocate enough land to plant fodder, and be ready to save some cash money to buy the necessary inputs; 5) improving the management of animals in terms of feeding, housing and cleaning is important to keep the animals healthy and avoid different risks that expose animals to disease. Therefore, farmers need to take special attention to the management of animals; 6) Additional skills on the feeding and management of fattening animals need to be developed among farmers and hands-on training on this subject will be given in due time.

Some farmers asked questions as to who will own the profit from the fattening trial, and if the sheep supplier would bear part of the costs of dead animals. The facilitators explained that the profit totally belongs to the farmer and there will be no sharing of profits. The sheep supplier will not have any responsibility as the sheep were examined healthy at the time of delivery.

After the discussion, two groups of farmers appeared to emerge: those who want to shift to cattle fattening and others who want to continue with sheep fattening but with less number of sheep (an average of 2 sheep) per household. The facilitators informed farmers that further interactions will be made with farmers and based on the response and desire of individual farmers they will be clustered accordingly to continue with the project.

**Key decisions and outcome/s:**

* The farmers have diverse interests with regard to the livestock production activity and it appears necessary to cluster the farmers into different groups according to their interests
* Training on fodder production, animal feeding, housing and management and health care is necessary
* Acquisition of fattening animals by farmers need to be facilitated in time to avoid delays in the commencement of the fattening when the planted fodder is ready for use

**A way forward/ recommendations/suggestions (if any):** Key suggestions that came out from the discussion include the following:

1. Individual farmers have to be involved in the selection and purchase of animals to be fattened
2. Individual farmers have to be encouraged to access their own source of cash to buy fattening animals
3. Further quick baseline survey questionnaire needs to be administered to identify which individual farmers wants which type of livestock fattening
4. Further work needs to be done to make women on board in this fattening activity,
5. Field assistants need to be employed to collect data from farmers’ fields and record regular measurements.

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| **Case story:** *Was there anything that struck you as really interesting during the trip? If so, you are encouraged to briefly describe it here (with pictures if possible) so that we can share these insights with the rest of the Africa RISING team and beyond.*  Group photo of field day participantsC:\Users\aadie\Desktop\DSC01301.JPGF:\DCIM\101MSDCF\DSC01275.JPG  **Farmers and experts evaluating sheep performance**F:\DCIM\101MSDCF\DSC01281.JPG  A farmer presenting his sheep for participatory evaluation |